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Subject: Carolina Journal: Cooper Will Decide Immediate Fate of Proposed Wind Farms

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Will Rierson: July 11, 2017 – 4:00 AM

UPDATE: Gov. Roy Cooper says he is “considering all of the options” when it comes to House Bill 589. Cooper told reporters Tuesday morning that he fully supported the original House version of the bill but has concerns about the bill as approved. The governor plans, “in the next week or so,” to hear from solar- and wind-energy advocates, the military, Duke Energy, and “people who care about this issue” before deciding whether to sign or veto the bill.

An amended energy bill is putting supporters of renewable energy at odds with a state Senate leader concerned about the effect of wind farms on military bases.

One of many bills on Gov. Roy Cooper’s desk, [House Bill 589](#) places an 18-month moratorium on permits for new wind farms, and two companies may drop plans for facilities planned for eastern North Carolina.

Senate Majority Leader [Harry Brown, R-Onslow](#), introduced the bill. He told [Carolina Journal](#) the waiting period for new permits would allow legislators to study how wind turbines may threaten local military exercises. The location of wind turbines, which can reach up to 600 feet, can affect the flight patterns of low-flying aircraft.

If the military can’t fully use airspace along the North Carolina coast, some state leaders say the military may pull out of the Cherry Point Marine airfield, and Seymour Johnson Air Force Base, in the next round of base shakeups. Local communities would lose thousands of high-paying civilian jobs if the bases emptied.

“There’ll be winners and losers in the process, so I think we need to protect our bases, which are an economic driver for our state,” Brown said. “Ask [military leaders] and they’ll tell you, if you can’t train, you’re no longer viable.”

The Timbermill Wind project in Chowan County and Little Alligator wind farm in Tyrrell County could have received permits within a year, though the moratorium would delay the process until at least the last day of 2018.

Apex Clean Energy, the developer of the Timbermill project, has been paying area landowners since 2013.

Apex CEO Mark Goodwin said the moratorium “jeopardizes hundreds of millions of dollars of investment in rural economies.”

Brown said he thinks renewable energy sites are beginning to hurt nearby property values, a problem centered in eastern North Carolina, far from most supporters of renewable energy.

“If those wind turbines were lining the ridges of the mountains, or popping up in large counties like Wake or Durham, I think you’d see people taking a different view,” he remarked.

The wind farm moratorium has shifted attention from regulatory reforms within the bill.

“That’s been the driver of all the discussion over it, and I think that’s a smaller aspect [of the bill],” said [Jon Sanders](#), director of regulatory studies at the [John Locke Foundation](#). “This is a major change in state law.”

Sanders says solar energy is given special treatment in North Carolina. He says a state law requiring utilities in the state, primarily Duke Energy, to buy a percentage of their power from renewable sources (including solar) results in artificially high rates that are passed on to consumers.

“Just move away from favoring [one] over the others. Let them compete,” Sanders argued. “If they compete against other energy sources, consumers should win.”

The bill also allows third parties to lease space, including rooftops, for solar energy providers. Cooper issued a press release in June praising the bill before the moratorium was added.

Brown thinks solar is overbuilt in the eastern part of the state, and said he supports energy diversity.

Rep. John Szoka, R-Cumberland, sponsored the bill and has made clear he has no intention of interfering with wind-energy development. The moratorium was one of many late additions to Szoka’s original bill.

“Certainty is important in business, and you think it’d be important to the wind industry,” Brown said.

Cooper has until July 30 to decide if he will sign the bill, veto it, or let it become law without his signature.